



The Basic Endplay

by Bob Gruber

Today, let's concentrate on an intermediate technique called the "strip and end play." Just what is a strip and end play? Rather than give a complex definition, I'd rather present the end play in terms of its indicators and then examples of its execution.

But for those that absolutely insist on a definition here's a lagniappe:

An end play is an attempt to improve the odds of winning a trick in a particular suit by forcing an opponent to break the suit, or lead into a tenace in the suit, or to give a ruff-and-a-sluff

Avoid breaking a suit
Avoid a finesse

What are the indicators an end play might be possible? Here they are in the order you're most likely to notice them.

1. Relatively long trumps in each hand—needed to pull the opponents' trumps and still have one in each hand for a ruff-sluff possibility

Long trumps
in each hand

2. A card combination in a side suit that will benefit by having an opponent (or particular opponent) break the suit

J54	KJ3	Kx(x)	Ax
Q63	A105	xx(x)	Qx

A side suit to
avoid leading

3. A 2nd side suit that can be eliminated in both declarer's hand and dummy's hand. Could be an equal-length suit or an unequal-length suit that can be eliminated, i.e. stripped, by ruffing. (Sometimes it suffices to eliminate the suit in the hand of the opponent you intend to throw in.)

A side suit to
eliminate

4. A 3rd side suit that is equal-length in both hands. You need to delay playing the last card in this suit, a loser, until after the "elimination" (indicator # 3) has been accomplished.

A side suit to throw
an opponent on lead

Does an end play always occur near the end of the hand? No, sometimes it occurs very early. Take this hand.

♠ A Q x x	♠ J x x	♠ x x x x
♥ A Q x	♥ x x x	♥ J x x
♦ A Q x	♦ J x x x	♦ x x x
♣ A Q x	♣ J x x	♣ x x x

♠ K x	
♥ K x x x	
♦ K x x	
♣ K x x x	

	N	
W		E
	S	

Although not realistic, let's assume South is declarer and West is on lead. (Maybe West had all 4 aces hidden.) In any case, West is end played at trick 1, forced to give declarer one of her Kings by virtue of being on lead. Trick 1 !! It happens !



End plays that occur early are usually the result of one opponent's hand being overloaded with the outstanding high cards. It's nice to benefit, but not as satisfying as arranging for and pulling off the end play yourself. Those end plays usually occur much later in the play of the hand, hence the name. Those are the ones we want to explore.

OK, we know the indicators. Is there a technique to follow to set up the end play? Yes, and it's fairly simple:

1. Pull trumps
2. In the side suit to be eliminated, void your hand and dummy's of that suit (alternatively, eliminate the suit in the hand of the opponent you intend to throw in).
3. In the throw-in suit, an equal-length suit, cash any sure winners and then surrender the lead

	♠ K 7 6 5 4		
	♥ A 5		
	♦ A 10 5		
	♣ 9 7 6		
♠ A 9 8			♠ —
♥ Q J 10 9			♥ K 7 6 3 2
♦ Q 9 7 6			♦ 4 3 2
♣ 3 2			♣ Q J 10 5 4
	♠ Q J 10 3 2		
	♥ 8 4		
	♦ K J 8		
	♣ A K 8		

Contract: 4♠ by South
 Lead: ♥Q
 Losers: 1 in ♠, 1 in ♥, 1 in ♣
 Possible loser: 1 in ♦

Guess the ♦Q -or- try for an end play?

The end play, if you can arrange it, is a sure thing. Let's go through the checklist.

1. Long trumps in each hand? Yes.
2. A side suit that will benefit if the opponents lead/break the suit? Yes, ♦s.
3. A side suit that can be eliminated in declarer's hand and dummy's hand? Yes, ♥s.
4. A side suit that can throw an opponent on lead at the right time and simultaneously eliminate the suit in declarer's and dummy's hands? Yes, ♣s.

The Play:

Duck the ♥Q and when West continues with the ♥J, win the Ace. Pull all the trumps, which takes 3 rounds, but eliminates a trump lead as a safe exit for the opponents. It also leaves you with 2 trumps in each hand so a ruff-sluff is still in the picture.

Now, with ♥s eliminated in our hands and no trumps in the opponents' hands, it's time to eliminate ♣s and throw one of the opponents in with your last club (in each hand). In this case, East will win and have a choice of leading a ♦ into dummy's A 10 or giving a ruff-sluff in either ♥s or ♣s. Both plays lead to a guaranteed 10th trick.

A similar fate would befall West should he be the one to win the 3rd round of ♣s. The choice would be lead a ♦ into declarer's K J or give a ruff-and-a-sluff.



Only E-W Vulnerable			
W	N	E	S
2♠	P	3♠	4♣
P	5♣	All Pass	

♠ 6 4
 ♥ A 6 3
 ♦ Q 7 6
 ♣ K 8 7 6 3
 ♠ K J 9 7 5 3 ♠ Q 10 8 2
 ♥ Q 8 5 ♥ 9 7 4 2
 ♦ 10 9 ♦ K J 8 4 2
 ♣ Q 4 ♣ —
 ♠ A
 ♥ K J 10
 ♦ A 5 3
 ♣ A J 10 9 5 2

Contract: 5♣
 Lead: ♠7
 Possible losers: 1 in ♥, 2 in ♦

To succeed, you need the ♦K with West -or- a successful finesse for the ♥Q -or- an end play might be available.

Can you arrange an endplay?

1. Long trumps in each hand? ✓.
2. A side suit that will benefit if a particular opponent leads/breaks the suit? ✓, ♥s.
3. A side suit that can be eliminated in declarer's hand and dummy's hand? ✓, ♠s.
4. A side suit that can throw an opponent on lead at the right time and simultaneously eliminate the suit in declarer's and dummy's hands? ✓, ♦s.

The Play:

All the elements for an end play are present.

Perforce, you win the ♠A at trick 1. Now, you just need to pull trumps with the ♣A and ♣K, ruff dummy's spade, cash the ♦A, and lead a ♦ toward the Q.

If the ♦K is on-side, one ♦ loser has gone away and the contract is safe. But even if the opponents win 2 ♦ tricks, the contract is safe. Whichever opponent wins the 3rd round of ♦s must break the ♥ suit, thereby eliminating a loser, or give a ruff-sluff, which also eliminates a loser.



This hand illustrates two points. 1) long trumps can be a relative term, and 2) the throw-in suit can be the trump suit.

W	N	E	S
			2♣
P	2♦*	P	4♠
All Pass	* at most one K		

		♠ Q 7 2	
		♥ 5	
		♦ 7 5 4	
		♣ J 10 9 7 6 2	
♠ K 6			♠ 4
♥ J 10 9 2			♥ A 7 6 4 3
♦ J 9 6 3 2			♦ K Q 10 8
♣ A 4			♣ Q 8 5
		♠ A J 10 9 8 5 3	
		♥ K Q 8	
		♦ A	
		♣ K 3	

Contract: 4♠

Lead: ♥J

Possible losers: 1 in ♠, 1 in ♥, 2 in ♣

To succeed, you need to pick up the ♠K -or- guess the ♣ situation, assuming the honors are split or both are on-side -or- execute an end play.

How does the checklist for an end play stack up?

1. Long trumps in each hand? Maybe, we'll have to see.
2. A side suit that will benefit if a particular opponent leads/breaks the suit? Yes, ♣s.
3. A side suit that can be eliminated in declarer's hand and dummy's hand? Yes, ♥s.
4. A side suit that can throw an opponent on lead at the right time and simultaneously eliminate the suit in declarer's and dummy's hands? No, but the trump suit may do the trick. In order for that to work, a second side suit, in this case ♦s, will have to be eliminated. That can be done, but we'll have to see which opponent wins the throw-in card.

The Play:

West's ♥J is taken by East's ♥A. East now plays the ♠4. If you think East is unlikely to be underleading the K, think about an end play possibility. If West can be forced to lead the ♣ suit, a club loser will be eliminated. Can you strip the hand of ♥s and ♦s? Yes, thanks to the opening ♥ lead. If West has the K x in ♠, he can be end played because a 2nd round of trumps will still leave one in dummy. Given a 2-1 break, 3 trumps will be enough!

Following your intuition, you rise with the ♠A. You're gratified when West follows with the 6. Not as gratified as if had been the K, but still a positive step. Next you cash ♥K and ♥Q, throwing ♦s from dummy. Now, with ♥s and ♦s eliminated, you lead a ♠ and hope that West wins it.

When he does, a ♣ lead or a ruff-sluff holds your ♣ losers to 1. If a tricky East wins and leads a ♣, you'll have to fall back on guessing the club position.



W	N	E	S
			1♦
P	2♦	2♥	2♠
3♥	P	P	4♣
P	5♦	All Pass	

♠ Q 7		♠ 10 8 4 2
♥ Q J 8 5		♥ A K 10 9 3
♦ 6 3		♦ J 8
♣ J 8 5 3 2		♣ Q 9
		♠ K J 5 3
		♥ 6
		♦ Q 9 5 4 2
		♣ A K 4

Contract: 5♦
Lead: ♥Q
Possible losers: 1 in ♠, 1 in ♥, 1 in ♣

To succeed, you need to pick up the ♠Q -or- execute an end play.

What does the end play checklist look like?

1. Long trumps in each hand? Check.
2. A side suit that will benefit if a particular opponent leads/breaks the suit? Check, ♠s.
3. A side suit that can be eliminated in declarer's hand and dummy's hand? Check, ♥s.
4. A side suit that can throw an opponent on lead at the right time and simultaneously eliminate the suit in declarer's and dummy's hands? Check, ♣s.

The Play:

West led the ♥Q and continued with the J, which you ruffed. To eliminate ♥s, you need to ruff another one in hand, which means you need the ♦s to be 2-2 to leave you with 1 in hand after pulling trumps.

You proceed to play 2 rounds of trumps, winning in dummy, and they do break 2-2. Now you can hold off on the ♠ finesse. You ruff the 3rd round of ♥s, cash the ♣A and ♣K, and exit a ♣.

When West won the ♣J, he was stuck, either lead away from the ♠Q or give a ruff-sluff. Had East won the ♣, declarer would try the ♠ finesse.